

## Daily life 91

### Chapter 91 Not Taken A Breath In 75 Years

The moment the carriage was a few inches from the gate to the Glowing respite valley both eagle statues opened one of their eyes. The one on the left opened its right eye as the one on the right opened its left eye.

The eyes flashed with a gentle white glow that covered the carriage and Feng Xin. There were ancient glyphs flashing from their eyes as the glow wrapped around the carriage.

"Confirmed: Order issued carriage number 9112.

Confirmed personnel of the Order:

Yang Qing: Employee number 2140.

Designation: Superior core court judge

Yi Jie: Employee number 2142

Designation: Chief inquisitor under judge Yang Qing.

ENTRY GRANTED."

The two eagle statues mechanically said as their white glow scanned the carriage, Yi Jie and Yang Qing.

"Who would believe that these two statues despite their aged appearance and small figure have enough might to kill a peak domain expert in less than five minutes," Yang Qing said as he sighed in admiration within the carriage.

"I'm curious which senior made it. Did Chief Song ever tell you who it was? With a creation of this level the creator must be pretty well known among their craftsmanship circle," Yi Jie said.

Creak

The gates started opening gently as they creaked like aged gates that had been beaten by storms over centuries.

"Chief Song said he still doesn't know who made it despite asking around. By his guesses, it may be one of the members of the spirit council or it may have been a treasure found in some ancient ruin of some bygone era and was retrofitted. He strongly supports the latter as the puppetry technique and inscriptions used on the statue haven't been seen or heard of in the past 10,000 years.

It might be the reason why despite them being so powerful they are not fully sentient and only function based on preset commands," said Yang Qing as the carriage continued on its merry way as the entrance quickly closed behind them as the eagles' eyes lost their white glow and went back to their gray marble look.

Those two eagle statues were among one of the many unanswered mysteries in the Order. They were the first line of defense to the Glowing respite valley, a valley that housed the living quarters of the Order employees and their families.

Though it was called the Glowing respite valley it was a valley in name only. It was roughly the size of a small kingdom standing at 10 million acres. The land was originally part of the territory of a fallen holy land, the Myriad beasts sect.

Holy lands other than having astronomical power also had vast territories that would put other sects, empires, and clans to shame in both size and quality. The current size of the Glowing respite valley was but a drop in the bucket of the territory the Myriad beasts sect owned.

When the sect got destroyed about 10,000 years ago most of their lands got gobbled up by the various cultivation sects, clans, and kingdoms around them. The two holy lands i.e the Radiant sword sect and the Flowing valley sect didn't grab the land as Holy lands usually gave each other a wide berth between their territories. The Radiant sword sect is located on the southeastern side of the southern continent with its territory bordering the celestial ocean that separates the southern continent from the western continent. As for the Flowing valley sect, it's located on the northern side of the continent right next to the churning sea that separates the southern continent from the central continent. Lastly was the

Myriad beasts sect whose bulk of territory was on the western side of the continent right next to the Millions treasure ocean.

With its destruction, its territory got swept up by the powerful sects and clans right next to it with the two holy lands only grabbing the core treasures and cultivation arts collection of the sect leaving the buildings and the rest of the treasures, artifacts and other cultivation resources to be fought over by others. The ensuing battle that resulted from this was one of the major among many strings of bloodbaths to ever hit the southern continent. The victors from that war ended up forming the current rank 1 sects and clans. Even though the two holy lands took the major things the rest of what they left was still enough to support the growth of a few soul formation experts.

Rumor had it that the founder of the ghost blood hand syndicate was one of the beneficiaries of that war as he had managed to swipe something from one of the major branches belonging to the Myriads beast sect.

This was one of the reasons Holy lands were feared by other cultivators. Just a few scraps from them was able to change the fate of a few cultivators into powerhouses what about the main thing?

As for the present Glowing respite valley, it was originally the waste dumping ground that the Myriad beasts sect used. Ordinarily, spirit beast waste would be considered a treasure trove by alchemists and herbologists but the Myriad beasts sect mostly kept nefarious beasts of all kinds who had no small amount of danger to them from toxins to baleful air. This translated even to their waste. The dumping area turned into a place filled with miasma that would grant an early-stage core formation expert a quick but gruesome death if they dared to step into the outskirts of the area.

The area caused no small amounts of deaths during the war for Myriad beast sect territories. As it was filled with all kinds of arrays, most assumed they were used to guard a precious treasure. The tougher it was to break in the more their greed told them this was the motherload forgetting the fact if there was anything precious in there the Holy lands would have already snatched it.

What they got instead when they finally breached a small portion of the array was a painfully welcoming death followed by a stench that drove even middle-stage palace stage experts to insanity. The most powerful expert to fall victim was a seventh-stage domain expert who thought all the waste there was just a trap to fool others. He smugly ventured deeper thinking he had hit the nail on the head only to never come out.

The area got quickly cordoned off and the broken array was repaired as more were added a few hundred miles extra around it for good measure. The area soon became no man's land.

It was only 150 years later after the Order was established that they decided to grab the land that no one wanted, for themselves. They became a laughing stock to the rest of the continent for their attempt. But in fifty years they had thoroughly transformed the area from a wasteland that no one wanted into what it was now.

It was a blessed land whose qi was ten times that of any rank 2 sect and that was at the entrance of the gate where Yang Qing and Yi Jie were. The land that spewed death with its stench and miasma now had a verdant and vibrant look with fresh air that would leave any artist inspired for their entire lifetime and poets never lacking a stanza.

There was a spiritual river cutting across the land with banks filled with lush vegetation and herbs. There was no shortage of earth-rank herbs that any rank 5 sects would die to have. The grasses were green with tinges of blue as they produced a hazy blue mist around them. They were breathing out qi same as all the other plants in the area.

They consumed the unfiltered qi in their surrounding as they breathed out gentler and purer qi. The few sky-rank trees growing several meters apart further added to that qi.

With the abundant qi, the picturesque landscape, the misty mountains by the horizon, and the spirit beasts flying about, the area looked like an immortal's lair rather than the layer of hell it was before.

The seventh stage domain expert who had tried to force his way to the core regions of the area when it was a wasteland was later found by the people of the Order. He was knocking on death's door. His legs had dissolved, and his skin was sallow as it hugged his bones. He had scratch marks all over most likely self-imposed. He was delirious at the time as he weakly muttered 'death air' over and over. The Order rescued him and tried to send him back to his sect but it had long been destroyed in the five thousand years since the seventh stage domain expert disappeared.

With no other option, the Order decided to take him in and handled his rehabilitation and care since he had suffered extensive damage not only to his physical body but even his soul got poisoned from the long-term exposure not to mention the mental trauma that came with it. They were even surprised the domain expert had survived that long. It was only due to his exceptionally sturdy domain that he managed to survive that long. However, the corruption eventually tainted his domain almost crippling his cultivation.

After a long arduous journey, the domain expert regained some sense of normalcy and became lucid. Though there were some changes in his persona. For one he developed an extreme phobia for spirit beasts and even food. Though none of them was as extreme as his phobia for air. Cultivators once they reached the later stages of the core formation realm, could forego food and subsist solely on qi but breathing was the one thing they couldn't do without. They could hold long breaths some even stretching for years but they would eventually have to take that breath.

The domain expert thus decided to stretch that time as much as he could by practicing the turtle breathing art to perfection. It was originally an orange-grade art but through countless research and consultation with other members of the Order, the art got elevated to an upper-rank blue-grade art. With it, he would have no need to take a breath in 100 years. It has been 75 years since the art was upgraded and in all that time till the present time he hasn't taken a single breath.

Yang Qing and most other institute graduates heard the tale of that domain expert as part of their curriculum on the dangers faced by cultivators. One of the dangers taught was avarice. That domain expert as a way to pay back the Order insisted his tale be told to the young cultivators to help warn them against letting greed lead them to recklessness. He became one of the teachers at the institute and currently serves as one of the institute's deans as head of survival tactics for cultivators.

He now spends his days molding young minds and working on improving the turtle breathing art from a blue-grade art into a gold-grade art to reach his now dream of never having to take a single breath again.

## Chapter 92 92: Dream Cloud Abode

The carriage soon came to a stop at a fork in the road. Both sides of the road had two wooden signboards. The one on the left had the words 'eagle's wings' on them and the one on the right had the word 'eagle's eye'.

The carriage was driven to the left side with the sign 'eagle's wings'.

The Glowing respite valley land was separated into two zones. The side with the name 'eagle's wings' was the zone assigned to all employees of the Order while the side with the name 'eagle's eye' was assigned to the family members of the Order employees and the students of the Institute.

All who got accepted into the Order as students would be allowed to bring their families into the Glowing respite valley should they wish to do so. Since the Order mostly accepts students who come

from unranked families or little to no background to speak of, they are allowed to relocate with their clans or families when they get accepted into the Order.

This was what happened to Yang Qing. When he got accepted he was given the option to invite the Yang clan to the Order with him. They were a small unranked clan with less than two hundred members with the highest cultivator being only at the foundation stage. Similar cases were seen with other students who opted to migrate with their entire clan. It was also a safer option since the Order had no shortage of enemies or those who would use underhanded means to have their way.

The Order thus decided to create a separate zone within the valley to house the clans and the students before they graduated from the institute. The eagle's eye zone also catered to those who had no families too as there were plenty of orphans and runaways who came to the doors of the Order for a fresh start or a chance at changing their lives.

Once the students graduated they would then move to the 'eagle's wing'. They were allowed to bring their spouses, children, parents, or immediate guardians if they wished to. But the invite was only extended to immediate family while the rest could only remain in the 'eagle's eye' zone.

In terms of general standards both zones were almost similar in regard to size and qi density. So more often than not most family members opted to remain in the 'eagle's eye' zone with the rest of the clan members as they let their children move to the other zone and there were also cases though few, where the students chose to remain after graduating. Though those cases were far and few between.

In Yang Qing's case, he had made the offer to his parents, grandparents, and two siblings to come with him but they opted to stay with the rest of the Yang clan members as Yang Qing moved on alone.

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The carriage went on for a few minutes before it stopped at another junction which had four different roads with three signs with the name; blue valley, gold valley, and black valley as for the fourth road, it had no sign attached to it. However, a few mountain peaks could be seen in the distance on that road. Those mountain peaks were surrounded by a dense purple mist fog which made them seem ethereal as there were glittering stars within that fog.

"One day will come when I too will have my own peak," Yang Qing said with unconcealed envy as he pushed aside the carriage curtains to admire those mountain peaks. Yi Jie seemed to be mirroring his emotions as he clenched his fists with unconcealed desire shining in his eyes as he stared at those mountains.

"Yi Jie don't you think the Order is a little too stingy? We are cultivators and as cultivators shouldn't we all have a peak to ourselves instead of them being given to a select few? How could they give us a few farmlands and call that our abode and the nerve of them to tell me to go repossess an island on the Millions treasure ocean if I want a peak so much," Yang Qing angrily said.

Yi Jie could only roll his eyes at this statement. Yes, he agreed with Yang Qing on some level that they should have peaks. They spent countless days and nights as kids discussing how they would fly on swords and majestic cranes as they went to their abodes on some mountain peak somewhere. But when they graduated all they got was a piece of flat land that had the bare standardized minimum. If they wanted to make improvements to the place they would have to do it on their own and the costs they bore from the improvements would also be borne by them. The only good thing was they permanently owned that land even when they got promoted in ranks and could move to better places.

He still remembered how his expectations were ruthlessly smashed when he saw their 'peak abodes'. The soul-crushing disappointment became the impetus he needed to improve his wine-making skills while in Yang Qing's case, well he did some things that landed him with a year's salary worth of fines and giving free labor for six months to the mining division.

But he disagreed with Yang Qing's regard for their abodes as farmlands as any rank 2 sect would gladly migrate their whole sect to that farmland if given a chance while giving Yang Qing a beating for his pompous young master's foul mouth.

Yi Jie decided to calmly ignore Yang Qing's rumblings of his tortured stint in the mines and the hellish year he survived with no spirit stones and he had to freeload at his parents for the year.

The carriage took the route with the name blue valley. It was the location that housed those who were in the core formation realm while the gold valley housed those in the palace stage, the black valley was for those in the domain stage as for the mountain peaks they were for those who had reached the soul formation realm.

Yang Qing whose promotion wasn't official yet still had his abode in the blue valley.

"Will you be moving to the gold valley after your ceremony?" Yi Jie asked once he heard Yang Qing go silent to wet his dry throat from the incessant complaining.

"After all the effort I put to spruce the Dream cloud abode into what it is today from the lousy shack it was before, NO WAY!!," Yang Qing loudly roared seemingly getting more agitated and riled up the more he thought about it.

"I'll take resource compensation equivalent to the abode they will give me in the gold valley. I'll use those resources to further improve the Dream cloud. The Order isn't tricking me with their scheme of giving me another bottomless hole to pour my minuscule resources in so it can be livable," Yang Qing snottily said as he went silent once more. But one could hear him repeatedly click his tongue over and over.

Yi Jie didn't say anything once he heard Yang Qing's reply as his decision wasn't all that strange. He too had planned to go the same route when he broke through to the palace realm and got promoted. Most of the Order employees opted to stick with the first abode they had. Majorly it was because they had poured countless resources and man-hours into improving those abodes making it difficult for them to just switch up and move. The other was a healthy dose of fear of how bare the next abode they got would potentially be and them starting from scratch to improve the place.

Because of this, the gold valley had the least number of people settling there. In fact, the place was mostly occupied by spirit beasts due to how low the cultivator numbers were despite the Order having a high number of palace stage members. It was only when one became a domain expert would they consider moving to the black valley as the abodes there were fully customized with no expense spared on the Order's dime.

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The blue valley though it was named so, there was nothing blue in there. Other than the road the carriage was on and the trees by the side, everything else was covered by a hazy mirage to the left and the right of the road. The only thing that could be seen were small wooden planks with names on them every 100 meters on both sides of the road. They had weird names on them like; the silky spider abode, multitudinous mansions abode, the flawless beating ferry abode, the balanced desert abode, and so on.

The carriage proceeded forth for almost a mile before it stopped in front of a wooden plank on the left with the name 'Dream cloud abode'.

Yi Jie took out what looked like a small palm-sized wooden nest covered in white wool which he then pointed at the mirage next to the Dream cloud abode sign. The mirage shimmered as it parted letting the carriage through, and revealing the background behind it.

There was no longer a paved white moonstone road but a dark brown dirt pathway surrounded by a forest that was enormous, dense, and blooming. The trees that mostly composed this forest were fruit trees for example; ice dragon fruit trees, scorching apple trees, star radiant peach trees, rainbow mulberry trees, and the like all of which had thick stems, luscious leaves and for some odd reason not a single ripe and barely ripe fruit on them.

Sunlight gently cascaded down the leaves with a cacophony of bird noises and insect sounds echoing around. The dragon horses which ignored the grasses on the road over hurriedly started gobbling up the wild overgrowing grass next to the dirt road with greedy drooling looks. How could they not when the grass was dawning summer grass, a sky-rank herb known to be the nectar of grasses which had been soaking up the qi that was double in density compared to the outside of the mirage.

"Home at last," Yang Qing ruefully sighed as the mirage closed behind them with the carriage slowly moving along as the two dragon horses greedily swallowed everything along their path.

#### Chapter 93 93: The Choosey Cauldron

Past the lush forest was a small one-acre pond that was circular in shape with crystal clear water that made it easy to spot the different schools of fish floating about. The surface of the water had tricolored lilies. Their petals were made up of blue, pink, and white colors evenly distributed. The tricolored lilies were the ones responsible for the pond's crystal clear look as they had a purification ability and qi amplification ability.

Just as the carriage was about to go around the pond, a white streak flashed by heading straight at the pond. Before the streak reached the surface of the pond another figure flashed and pummeled that white streaked which then crashed into one of the trees.

"The nerve of you Ellie. Can't I have any good fish with you around? You already cleaned out my last batch before I had a taste, you didn't even spare the eggs. How greedy can you get? You've been hanging out with Feng Xin too much," Yang Qing said as he floated above the pond angrily pointing his finger at the cloud-swallowing kite that now had a swollen bump on its forehead as it stared aggrievedly at Yang Qing.

Screech!!

The cloud-swallowing kite cried sympathetically as it put its most pitiful look forward trying to draw compassion from Yang Qing.

"I'm hearing none of it," Yang Qing coldly snotted as he crossed his arms.

"You are banned from the pond for a month. If I find even a single egg missing I just might decide to have hot broth made from tender bird flesh. With the way you've been gluttonously feeding on the good stuff I bet I won't even have to add anything to the broth just boiling water will do," Yang Qing said as he flashed a malevolent greedy grin that sent the cloud-swallowing kite into a panicked frenzy as it tried to lower its head in apology.

Mmph.

Yang Qing turned as he floated next to the carriage. He knew despite the display of fear and regret from the cloud-swallowing kite at the moment it was only a matter of time before it ate his fish and disappear for a few months at the other inquisitors' abodes though it always avoided going to Feng Xin's place.

"Will you be sticking around or will you head to your abode first and come back later?" asked Yang Qing as he petted the dragon horses which narrowed their eyes in delight.

"I need to get a few things from my place first It shouldn't take more than a few minutes," Yi Jie said as he let go of the reigns and turned into a phantom blur disappearing from the carriage.

"He is already at the peak of the blooming stage slowly approaching perfection in his proficiency in the shadow void steps. He has always been rather gifted in speed," Yang Qing thought in admiration at Yi Jie's proficiency grade with the shadow void steps.

A proficiency grade was adopted within the southern continent when it came to grading a cultivator's familiarity with a particular cultivation art and they were as follows in ascending order;

Beginner- Emergent-Blooming- Perfection

However, it was believed that perfection wasn't the highest grade in mastery one could achieve in a cultivation art. There was a level above it and the cultivators who reached this level would be able to upgrade a cultivation art by a few grades once they reached that level in that particular cultivation art for example upgrading a red-grade cultivation art to a blue-grade art.

The creator of the shadow void steps had stumbled onto that level when he was studying the orange-grade art, the silent moon steps which eventually led to the evolution of the art into a gold-grade cultivation art.

However, reaching that level was easier said than done as pure effort and talent solely couldn't get you there. It was a combination of multiple factors some of which were timing, chance, and luck thus increasing the difficulty level of reaching that grade.

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Yang Qing didn't get back into the carriage but decided to leisurely walk around the pond greedily admiring the pods of fish happily swimming about as he whistled.

He went past a few other trees and banana leaves before a small courtyard appeared a few hundred meters from him.

The courtyard was made from yellow dusk wood which made it look like the setting glow of the sun. There was a large extended porch next to the entrance. There were half-ring stone benches, brown rattan chairs, and wicker chairs all surrounding a neatly built fireplace in the center with dining chairs and tables spread about at the ends of the porch. There were passion vines growing around the wooden beam poles around the courtyard extending to the green tiled roofing. Their purple flowers seemed to be glowing and almost lifelike resembling jellyfish as they swayed with the wind.

Though the courtyard and the porch looked picturesque and had some natural beauty to them, there were three objects surrounding it to the left, right, and back of the courtyard that made it hard to take in the view due to their unique presence.

To the left of the courtyard was an extremely tall tree about 700 feet tall filled with so many leaves that it looked like there were other trees growing from its branches. However, the strangeness of the tree wasn't the abundant leaves but the duality of the tree. The front half of the tree was pitch black which extended down to its leaves while its back half was pure white like the moon. This was the eclipse tree which despite its size was still at the juvenile stage.

To the right was a field filled with bamboo however unlike typical bamboo these were purple in color and they were surrounded by lightning. They were purple lightning bamboo, one of the best plants for tempering the flesh and also warding off evil spirits or fashioning a lightning element weapon.

At the back was a tree just about the same height as the eclipse tree however unlike the eclipse tree its crown, leaves, and top stem were all covered in green flames that gently swayed with the wind. This was the green flame tree the perfect nesting ground for avian spirit beasts due to its nurturing abilities. The flames also have healing properties and the leaves are as soft as crimson fox fur making them the best leaves to make a bed, pillows, and futons.

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Yang Qing unharnessed the carriage by the front of the courtyard as the dragon horses went their way to other parts around Yang Qing's 'farm land' that was 1,000 acres in size which was the standard size given to all Order employees in the core formation realm despite what stage they are at.

Yang Qing went into his courtyard and headed to the kitchen section as he picked up a bunch of earth wooden bowls and chopsticks along with white ceramic wine pots and accompanying wine urns. Yang Qing kept busy packing and storing various things from his kitchen into his storage ring. When he was satisfied he had picked everything he needed he walked back out meeting Yi Jie who was already back with what looked like a hollowed-out tree trunk in his hands.

The tree trunk was as thick as a small elephant's body and reached half his height. It had golden sigils etched on it and the symbol of an ancient-looking giant tortoise that had mountains, rivers, and forests on its shell.

This was Yi Jie's monarch rank cauldron, the Ao cauldron, a cauldron ironically despite its rank was horrible at making alchemy pills it always seemed like the cauldron's spirit purposely sabotaged the pill creation process but when it came to wine brewing it was an excellent partner. Yi Jie's great strides in wine-making were in part due to the Ao cauldron whose budding spirit seemed to favor the wine rather than alchemy pills and potions.

"I take it you're throwing the party out here again as usual," said Yi Jie once he saw Yang Qing remove a large dining table from his storage ring as he placed it on one of the empty spaces on the porch.

"With so many people coming, the porch is the best location," Yang Qing said as he went on arranging their various utensils and unloading the various dishes he bought from the Thousand flavors restaurant.

"Aha and that is not because you're afraid of having things stolen from your house particularly food and those other trinkets in there," Yi Jie mockingly said as he poured a light brown liquid from a wine casket into the Ao cauldron.

"It's precisely why the porch is the best location," Yang Qing said as he took greedy side sniffs of the light brown liquid Yi Jie was pouring into the cauldron.

"I knew even the hundred-leaf sugarcane wine wouldn't fall short. I get to drink fine wine and have a quasi-palace stage coachman for the week. What could be better?" Yang Qing smugly said as he swaggered about.

"I don't know, maybe whatever Lei Weiyuan has in store for you soon to be BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS Yang Qing," Yi Jie gently said as his lips curled into a triumphant smile when he saw Yang Qing's body twitch repetitively.

#### Chapter 94 94: Welcome Party (1)

Yang Qing decided silence was his best weapon at the moment as he didn't have the mental bandwidth to bicker with Yi Jie, arrange for the welcome party and also secretly worry and panic over Lei Weiyuan's plan for him.

He thus decided to do the only reasonable thing one would do in his situation which was to savor the moments day by day conveniently ignoring and pretending there was no noose potentially hanging over his neck. His years of being on the receiving end of the Order's reprimands and disciplinary actions made him a seasoned expert of the willful ignorance dao.

The duo went about their actions in silence. One neatly arranged the delicacies around the dining table while the other formed multiple hand seals that lit a pale white flame under the cauldron as he immediately started pouring different ingredients into the cauldron as he carefully stirred.

Two of the sigils of the Ao cauldron lit up as Yi Jie pumped his Qi into the cauldron. There was a gentle swooshing sound as the hundred-leaf wine was being stirred with a blue ice ladle. The brown wine was stirred in a clockwise pattern till it formed a small whirlpool in the cauldron. It slowly started changing its color from the initial dark brown with the color growing lighter and mellower with every swirl.

Yi Jie's stirring seemed to be measured to a specific rhythm. He would add fruits and herbs of different elements every now and then but despite the contrasting composition, they did not disrupt the balance, flow, and look of the wine. He had thrown in a storm raven wheat which is high in yin energy along with redeye baobab which is high in Yang energy along with other plants with contrasting attributes which if handled poorly would result in a cauldron explosion but despite all this, his pace never changed and the expected implosion never happened as the wine didn't so much as even form a bubble.

The river symbol on the ancient giant tortoise lit up with a blue glow which in turn slowly started transforming the almost light yellow hundred-leaf sugar cane wine into a clear crystal color that had tinges of blue color. Once Yi Jie saw the transformed color he smoothly slowed down his stirring until he came to a gentle stop. The swirling didn't stop as it continued by itself albeit in a gentler, slower motion. A small tortoise spirit appeared in the swirl as it swam with the swirling current. Yi Jie poured a few blocks of hundred-year-old tempered lunar ice that turned the whole brew into a white mist as he finally closed the cauldron's lid in satisfaction.

Yang Qing who had thought of giving Yi Jie the cold shoulder and pretend he didn't exist was already next to him staring greedily at the cauldron.

"Your cauldron's spirit seems a bit larger and more defined than when I last saw it," Yang Qing said as he moved closer to the cauldron to inspect it.

"I managed to trade my merit points for a cup of night ashen spring water which helped unlock more of its river attributes. It wiped out ten years' worth of merit points but it was all worth it," said Yi Jie.

Getting just a single cup of the night ashen spring water had cost him close to 250,000 merit points. Ordinarily, a hard worker in the core courts would earn at least 1000 merit points per month barring extraordinary circumstances that may result in those numbers increasing. But those circumstances were rare as they involved someone either getting into unexpected perilous circumstances and surviving or bringing in unexpected results. For example, Feng Xin bringing in Dong Yanlin, a blood ghost hands member, and the Ao Yin saber along with him would result in him getting more than 1,000 merit points in his case evaluation.

It had taken Yi Jie surviving a few near-death experiences and exemplary results for him to get over 200,000 merit points in ten years. However, in his eyes spending all his saved-up merit points on a single cup of night-ashen spring water was well worth it. For one, the night ashen spring water was a top-grade monarch rank natural born treasure that was a must-have ingredient for any seasoned blue-grade blacksmith and above. When a blade was quenched in water that had just a single drop of night ashen spring water even if the ingredients were in the earth rank it would automatically raise the rank of the weapon to a sky rank weapon.

It was a dream ingredient for all blacksmiths due to its ability to improve an artifact's quality even finished ones. Yi Jie had been eyeing it ever since he bought the Ao cauldron from an auction. The cauldron may be a monarch-rank artifact but that was because it was still incomplete. If Yi Jie continuously nourished the cauldron with valuable treasures of the water attribute, earth attribute, and plant attribute to match the river, mountain, and forest symbols on it, it could evolve into an ascendant-grade treasure.

It was Chief Song Chuanli who had made Yi Jie aware that the cauldron was incomplete as even the auction house he bought it from was unaware otherwise they wouldn't have let such a treasure slip off their hands for the price Yi Jie bought it for.

Yang Qing didn't mock Yi Jie for blowing all his merit points for a single treasure as he understood its purpose. He would have donated his merit points but merit points were nontransferable which was a measure the Order employed to ensure individual productivity and reduce chances of people leeching off each other. They had most likely created it with Yang Qing's tendencies in mind but unluckily or luckily merit points were the one thing Yang Qing never lacked especially with his seasoned archeology skills and cultivation art dissection abilities that have netted him no small amount of merit points.

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Yi Jie took a bite of a spring roll as he took a sit on one of the rattan chairs as he waited on the wine to stabilize. Yang Qing was still busy moving about arranging the food and cutlery. When he was done, he went to his backyard and came back with a dozen logs over his shoulder. He sliced the logs with his palms as easily as a knife through butter. He picked a few of the cut logs and neatly arranged them over the fireplace as he snapped his finger and a fireball was produced which then jumped onto the logs instantly lighting them up.

He picked one of the wine pots that had the 1,000-year-old silent lake elderberry wine along with two wine urns. He poured a cup for Yi Jie and himself. It was deep, dark, rich ruby red and purple in color, with fantastic violet nuances. Yi Jie the wine enthusiast he was had his eyes light up when he saw it. He went through all the motions one would expect from those who gave proper respect to wine while Yang Qing slurped his like a thirsty man stumbling near river water as he quickly poured himself another.

"It doesn't quite match your creations but it is still something. I'm afraid only Jiang Fu's oolong tea would match your wine," said Yang Qing. Though despite his criticism his eyes narrowed into a crescent shape every time he took a sip.

"Just one thing is missing to push the taste even further," Yang Qing said as he rose up and put a few sweet and sour spare ribs onto a plate, and came back to his seat.

"P..e..r..f..e..c..t, truly delish," Yang Qing said as he pored the wine with the ribs. Yi Jie looked at him as if he was looking at an oaf but he too picked up the ribs as he ate along with the wine. His eyes lit up once the flavor of the ribs met up with the wine as they exploded in his mouth.

"Qi Shan has made another leap in her dao," Yi Jie said with praise as he savored the sweet and sour spare ribs.

"Mmmh," Yang Qing replied in a muffle as he stuffed another rib into his mouth.

As the two were enjoying themselves two ladies appeared out of the corner of their eyes. The lady on the left had a white coat that had green leaf images on it and beneath the coat was a pale yellow robe which added a nature vibe to her that perfectly blended with the surrounding. She had a gentle and mature beauty to her that was further enhanced by the bun that was tied up with three magnificently polished bones. It was Luo Meili.

To her right was Su Jinjing whose average looks and unadorned short hair made her big limpid pure eyes stand out along with her light cherry pink dress that added an innocent charm to her.

"Starting off the party without us how ungentlemanly of you boss," Luo Meili said in a gentle smile as she made her way over with her gaze lingering briefly over Yang Qing's eclipse tree.

"Yang Qing can redeemer sleep in your green flame tree for a few days. I have a feeling he would enjoy it there," Su Jinjing pleadingly said as she skipped over.

"Sorry Jinjing, the green flame doesn't work well with non-l...i mean it doesn't work well with other living species that are not birds," Yang Qing said as he almost let slip a Su Jinjing taboo word. She hated her spear being called an artifact or anything that made it remotely seem like an object instead of a living thing.

"Don't worry Jinjing I can lend you my Zodiac twilight rock. It will do wonders to nourish redeemer," Zheng Hu's voice trailed over before he appeared on the corner. He had a red short sleeve robe and shirt that was left open at the chest exposing his well-toned body and white shorts as he walked bare feet.

"Really?" Su Jinjing's mood lit up as she asked.

"Sure, I won't be using it for a while as I'll be using the next few weeks to a month to break through to the peak of core formation. I can't have our two bosses leave me behind. The gap is already big I can't have it grow any wider," Zheng Hu said with a carefree smile.

"I need to work harder too," Su Jinjing somberly said as she clenched her fists in determination.

Yi Jie and Yang Qing were still busy with their ribs before Yang Qing decided to speak up when he had finished wolfing down the spare rib in his hand.

"If you're confident then do it. I know you're not the reckless type when it comes to cultivation. You've stayed in the 9th stage long enough, your foundations are more than sturdy. If only that gluttonous Feng Xin would have your drive instead of loafing around clearing his name off the blacklists," Yang Qing said in exasperation.

"Boss I..," Luo Meili who was always a picture of gentle calmness now had a guilty look appear on her face.

"It's okay, take your time. I know your situation is a bit more special especially when it comes to your physique. Do not be in a rush, the deeper you excavate its mysteries the easier your journey ahead. Yi

Jie and I will make due though he will also be going into seclusion soon. I wonder how I will survive the palace courts by myself," Yang Qing said worriedly.

Luo Meili who had a guilty expression couldn't help but chuckle lightly at Yang Qing's switch in emotions.

The more he thought about it the more things didn't seem like they would get any easier, especially without his nan... I mean chief inquisitor Yi Jie.

"I see staggering fines in his future,"

"Hugely,"

"No doubt about that,"

"It's him so it's a given. I bet the higher-ups can't wait,"

Everyone present gave a word in, taking pleasure in Yang Qing's upcoming misfortunes.

"Is there no good egg among you, even you Jinjing? I thought you'd be the nice one. Who poisoned you? is it Yi Jie or the other leech,?"

"Regret hurrying to the palace stage now are we?" Feng Xin mocking laughter sounded as he appeared with a rainbow mist toad to his right and a 60-meter mirage dragonfly to his right.

Chapter 95 95: Welcome Party (2)

"It seems I will need to give you a thorough training session before I leave. I can't have my top go-to person stuck at the peak of the 10th stage of the core formation realm. It would be remiss of me as your boss to leave an underling with so much potential unattended to.

Feng Xin, I'll need you here every day after work. I'll file the training with the administration as a standard valuation by the superior just to ensure everything is on the up and up. We are in the business of Order after all," Yang Qing said menacingly with a not-so-polite smile.

"Yi Jie..," Feng Xin who was full of hot air just seconds ago had now turned shriveled like a dried bark as he turned to Yi Jie for help.

"I happen to agree with him on this. If Yang Qing didn't do it, I planned to give you pointers myself. With me going into seclusion you will be the one left in charge of the team with Luo Meili to keep you in check.

With the current state of things and the targeted attacks on Order employees you all need to train harder especially you Feng Xin. At the very least you need to be at a level where you can guarantee your life against an early-stage palace realm expert without the use of talismans and other monarch-rank treasures. Who knows when the unexpected may happen?

Our enemies with results based off their attacks already know that every Order employee has at least one treasure that is above their cultivation realm and have therefore been planning accordingly and refining their attack plans subsequently.

The attack on Lai Lei eight months ago should be proof of this," Yi Jie solemnly said.

"I know," Feng Xin's frivolous look turned solemn once he heard the mention of Lai Lei.

Lai Lei was an inquisitor who was a half-step into the palace stage just like Yi Jie presently. Eight months ago during the commission of his duties, he was besieged by fifteen half-step palace stage experts.

He managed to kill ten of his attackers, wound the rest, and even manage to escape alive but not without paying a price. His dantian had cracks and he had lost a leg and an arm. As cultivators regrowing limbs was easy but mending a dantian required incredible skills from someone at least at the blue grade in terms of medicine and resources that were at least in the upper ranks of the monarch grade.

Lucky for Lai Lei the Order had both however an attack on him and one that was at that scale had sent alarm bells in the Order. At first, they were even surprised how Lai Lei made it out of the siege intact. Yes, he was a seasoned inquisitor with a quasi-gold core that would make him one of the best at his level but dying with his opponents was the best-case scenario that the Order would have expected from such an encirclement.

It was only later through investigations that they discovered eight of the fifteen half-palace stage experts had reached that realm through artificial means such as employing secret arts and alchemical pills making their powers weaker than regular half-step palace stage experts. However, despite all this, they still presented a very real threat along with the seven other genuine half-step palace stage experts.

It was for this reason that the first thing Yang Qing did when he broke through to the palace stage was create talismans to try and increase his team's odds of survival just in case something like that were to happen.

"Has Dai Chen heard anything?" Yi Jie suddenly asked

"He hasn't. Those behind the attacks covered their tracks well. For the past few years the perpetrators have been getting better and better at hiding their tracks and leaving little to no clues to go by," Yang Qing sighed as he thought about Dai Chen.

Dai Chen did his best to hide it but those close to him could still tell the attack on his inquisitor and the dried-up clues hit him hard.

"Enough about that, we need to focus on the matter at hand which is the welcoming of two new members to this little group of ours," Yang Qing suddenly said as he put some cheer in his tone to try and uplift the somber mood.

"Right. I was curious about my two new teammates especially after hearing they were residents of the infamous green fog region I couldn't wait to meet you two. Are the spirit beasts there as infamous as the stories make them out to be? I've always wanted to go but sadly my cases never seemed to bring me there," Zheng Hu sighed in regret as he said this.

"Feng Xin, how was it there? seeing you got a firsthand experience of the place," Zheng Hu asked with a battle intent smile as he went to pour himself a cup of the 1,000-year-old silent lake elderberry wine.

"Well based on my brief interaction with them they had interesting abilities and they were above average as compared to normal spirit beasts. Battle-hardened and bloodthirsty too, though I think the latter is a detriment to them as it made them react mostly on instinct instead of using their intellect," Feng Xin said as his eyes got glued to the food spreading on the table.

"Though there was that one spirit beast that got away. A green flash viper. It showed astute battle awareness, intellect, and great judgment. I don't know if it was the leader but it ran away the instant I made my move with no hesitation. Even its positioning during the encirclement seemed well thought out.

I wonder what it tastes like. A powerful spirit beast like that definitely has devoured its fair share of precious herbs and other spirit beasts. It's bound to have a flavorful taste.

Oh yeah, Yi Jie that reminds me," Feng Xin who was already mid drool hurriedly fished out the corpse of the rapid snapper cotton mouth from his storage ring. The jaw was still thawing from the slice made by the eternal winter leaf.

"You can use its blood to make the eighth rising tide wine right? It may just be at the 5th stage of the core formation but it should still add some kick to the wine right? Even if it's just a tiny bit," Feng Xin said as he gently placed the rapid snapper cotton mouth on one of the tables.

Both Yi Jie and Yang Qing had already moved to the table as they closely scrutinized the corpse.

Bolin and Haishi had complicated looks as they watched their short-term 'teammate' get evaluated on his edibility.

The rapid snapper cotton mouth may not have been as powerful as any of the false kings but it was still one of the most powerful core formation spirit beasts beneath them, especially with its high speed, terrifying venom, and its steel-like scales. It made it a tough opponent to face off against which was why the black cosmos caiman favored it as one of its trusted henchmen.

Bolin was at the 6th stage, one minor realm above it but even he didn't have the confidence of defeating it let alone the introvert Haishi whose only combat experience involved fighting insects in the foundation stage as she avoided any spirit beast at the core formation realm. She had an overly cautious ability and the only times she did anything remotely adventurous was following after the green flowered babirusa to enjoy the bounty it left behind. She thought today would be the same as all the other countless times before, she'd follow the babirusa find an area filled with precious herbs, eat her part and head back to her lair to sleep. But here she was, a soon-to-be mount and the green flowered babirusa turned into an ingredient and soon-to-be delicacy.

Though she doesn't know if it was because of her brief encounter with Feng Xin but every now and then she couldn't help but be curious about what the babirusa tasted like.

"No, No I will not eat you even if they offer. We may have not been friends but we could be considered long-time acquaintances. It's the least I can do...but if they threaten me to take a bite, I'm sorry rosa I will have to but I will do it begrudgingly," Haishi thought. Though internally she seemed conflicted her greedy shining compound eyes painted a different picture.

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Oblivious to Haishi's dilemma, the trio of Feng Xin, Yi Jie, and Yang Qing were busy verbally dissecting the rapid snapper cotton mouth as they bargained back and forth. After a heated debate and each member satisfied with their end, Yi Jie carefully drained its blood into a small brown gourd which despite its size was able to completely fit all the blood from the over 100-meter rapid snapper cotton mouth.

Once Yi Jie was done with his bit Feng Xin and Yang Qing teamed up to carve up the rapid snapper cotton mouth like skilled professionals with their finely crafted silver knives.

They expertly stripped off the skin with not even a minuscule flesh being cut out, removed the guts, and finally cleaned it with water filled with spiritual qi. Once they were satisfied they diced it into thin slices and slathered it with a mixture of eggs, herbs, and spices that Yang Qing had on hand.

"Only when food is involved do these two show a modicum of seriousness," Mao Yunru said as she showed up in a company of five. There were three ladies and two men. All three of the ladies were breathtakingly beautiful that they would put a clear serene moon to shame however they all paled to Mao Yunru with her big cloud-like eyes, loosely hanging purple hair, a short sleeve dress that had purple flowers on it, and a light white scarf. One of the men accompanying her would sneakily throw glances despite being warned off by the other gentleman by his side.

The gentleman throwing glances had blonde hair, deep blue eyes, and a medium build with an ocean blue robe on. He looked like a noble that many princesses would madly swoon over while the gentleman warning him was slenderly built, a lanky build, and had deep black hair tied in a topknot. He had almost baggy eyes and a tired look to him with his pale white skin. He looked like a librarian who never sees the light of day from burying himself in books.

Yang Qing who was busy at work had his pupils pause briefly when he saw Mao Yunru but he quickly averted his gaze before anyone could notice as he dealt with the rapid snapper cotton mouth.

Mao Yunru quickly covered her neck which had a faint blush.

One of the ladies accompanying Mao Yunru who had black flowing hair that had reached half her back couldn't help but narrow her eyes once she noticed Mao Yunru's and Yang Qing's reactions.

"Interesting," she lightly murmured to herself as she chuckled.

Chapter 96 96: Welcome Party (3)

Other than the long black-haired lady no one seemed to have noticed the brief interlude between the two.

After a few minutes, the last piece of the rapid snapper cotton mouth had been sliced into thin vertical strips of meat that were now being placed over a grill mesh with orange glowing charcoal at the bottom.

Feng Xin took over as he dutifully dipped the thin strips in chili oil and dropped them over the mesh with chopsticks made from radiant autumn oak.

In the meanwhile, Yang Qing went to his storage room and came back out with a medium-sized wine gourd that had the emblem of a vermilion bird drawn on it.

"GREAT," Feng Xin joyously said as his eyes lit up when he saw the wine. Yi Jie who was checking the hundred-leaf sugarcane wine had a greedy glint flash in his eyes when he saw the gourd.

Unlike those two, Yang Qing had a pained look in his eyes. How could he not when this was the only vermilion fruit wine he had? He had won it in an auction after paying close to 300,000 middle-grade spirit stones and trading a few treasures so he could afford it.

The wine was so potent that if a foundation establishment cultivator were to consume it they would explode from its turbulent and potent energy. The main ingredient was vermilion fruit whose grade depended on the stage of the tree and how ripe the fruit is. A vermilion tree that had properly matured would at the bare minimum reach the saint grade which is the equivalent of a soul formation cultivator.

However, it needs stringent measures to reach maturity one of which is a place blessed with an ancestral dragon meridian spirit vein.

When it came to spirit veins they were usually graded into low-grade, middle grade and high-grade spirit veins. However, there was a level above that where the spirit vein is so rich that it develops some sort of pseudo-spirit. That spirit usually appears as a dragon hence the spirit veins become known as dragon spirit veins which are further divided into three classes i.e. the lesser dragon, the mature dragon, and lastly the ancestral dragon. Most holy lands are supported by an ancestral dragon spirit vein.

The vermilion fruit wine Yang Qing had on him was made from a vermilion fruit harvested from a young vermilion tree that was at the peak of the monarch grade which is equivalent to the peak of the palace stage in terms of cultivation. As for the supplementary ingredients they were all at the very least peak of sky grade. This vermilion fruit wine could be considered one of his most prized treasures along with the eclipse tree, purple lightning bamboo, and the green flame tree.

Feng Xin and Yi Jie had both teamed to force it out of him as that was the only way he could get the various types of meat Feng Xin had on him and part of Yi Jie's wine supply.

Cao Ying was the next to show up with three other friends of similar age around 15 years. Two of them were guys and last was a lady with orange curly hair and orange eyes. They had all worn the standard institute's robe which was a black coat with dark orange robes that were embroidered with two symbols. One was a blue robin and the other was the golden eagle. The blue robin wasn't the smartest or the most powerful spirit beast but it was the most adaptable to unfamiliar surroundings. This signified the Order's hope for its students to always be adaptable.

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"Cao Ying it's great that you made it and your friends too," Yang Qing cheerfully said as he went to greet them like a dutiful host. He made sure to bring the vermilion fruit wine with him as he didn't trust Feng Xin or Yi Jie around it.

Cao Ying was the only one who seemed perfectly at ease as his three friends were all fidgety and nervous like young chicklings as they huddled together. They seemed both excited and nervous to be among their seniors from the Order.

"So who are your friends?" Yang Qing gently asked as he tried to ease their moods with a polite smile.

"This is Fu Ye, Yao Fang, and lastly Chen Zhilan," Cao Ying said as he pointed to them.

Fu Ye had a small build with tiny beadlike eyes that seemed to hide enormous intelligence in them. He had short black hair matching his eyes.

Yao Fang was medium built with dark grey hair that was tied into a half bun while Chen Zhilan the only lady in the group had orange curly hair and matching eyes, with a slender and tall build. She was the tallest of three and given a few years she would be toppling nations with her beauty and charm.

Yang Qing greeted them all with a polite smile which seemed to have had an effect on them as they seemed a bit calmer than when they came in. However, that calmness was soon disrupted by the guests that just showed up behind them.

"Yang Qing you're too shameless. You'd throw a party and not invite us?" said a yellow-haired youth who just appeared in a group of five. Three guys including the yellow-haired youth and two ladies.

"You're the only one I didn't tell Huilang," Yang Qing answered with mocking eyes of his own.

"Where's my spirit stones? It's already the end of the shift," Yang Qing said as he unceremoniously stretched his hands.

"Here, it's just two thousand middle-grade spirit stones," Kang Huilang said as he slapped a storage ring on Yang Qing's hand like some nouveau-rich young master. He had on a yellow coat whose sleeves were rolled back, a white-robed short sleeve shirt, and yellow shorts with yellow straw sandals seemingly mirroring Yang Qing's current look except Yang Qing's was green and his yellow.

"How are you acting so smug when I'm the one who loaned you the amount? You better pay me back in a month with interest," Xia Boqin calmly said. He still looked like a noble immortal with his pristine white robes and smoothened long flowing hair.

"I see you brought the good things out. Thanks in advance," Dai Chen greedily said as he dangerously eyes the vermilion fruit wine in Yang Qing's hand which made Yang Qing flinch as he felt he was being stared down by a dangerous beast. Dai Chen had on a black coat, a matching black shirt, and black shorts with sandals.

"Thanks for the invite Yang Qing," Yu Huifang who had worn a white dress that highlighted her cherry pink hair lightly said with a smile.

"Yes, th..a..n..k you Yang," Zhang Qingge the last of the group nervously said. Her breathtaking beauty and small stature made her stand out which was further accentuated by her shy looks.

"You can grab one of the tables there, Huilang you can sit in the backyard somewhere," Yang Qing politely and impolitely said.

"Oh yeah Cao Ying you can grab a table with your friends too," Yang Qing said when he noticed Cao Ying's friends rooted on the spot. Meeting one judge had already made them nervous now being surrounded by five with two of them being palace court judges made them too nervous to even move.

Cao Ying had to drag them away with an embarrassed smile on his face. He couldn't help but shake his head as he laughed as he remembered he was just like them a few months ago when he started working at the Thousand flavors restaurant. The first week he couldn't get any orders straight because of how nervous he was but over time with how easygoing Yang Qing and the rest were he adapted and got used to them.

"Now then with everyone here, I'd like to say one or two things. The Order has become a very important home for us, yes we occasionally disagree on a few things, but at the end of the day, this is where we can truly be ourselves.

It's a place that subverts the norms of the cultivation world. Here you can find a domain expert sharing laughs with a core formation expert, we don't have to backstab each other for resources yes the Order is a little stingy and could do better but it is still better than most places, and best of all fairer.

Haishi, Bolin there's not much I can say to you as I want you to judge with your own eyes and decide for yourselves what this place will be to you. But what I can say is as long as you are with us we will always look out for you as you are both now one of us and we look out for one of our own.

All I ask is never sully the Order's fundamental creeds even to your death.

With that WELCOME TO THE ORDER HAISHI, BOLIN," Yang Qing jubilantly with the crowd echoing his cheers as they raised their wine urns in welcoming them.

Chapter 97 97: Wisdom Pearl

Both Bolin and Haishi were dumbfounded. Everything about today seemed a little too surreal for them. They had left the place they called home for over a century to start off in an unfamiliar place filled with human cultivators.

When they faced off against Feng Xin they had expected to die but they ended up living by sheer luck because Feng Xin found them useful alive more than dead. After that one of them had expected to be an alchemical ingredient whose days and body would be spent under the knife and constantly being researched on by overzealous alchemists while the other expected to be bird food. When that didn't happen they at the very least expected to be slaves with little to no rights. They never expected to be considered comrades to human cultivators none the least.

Bolin was no saint, he had killed and eaten his fair share of human cultivators who went wandering near his lair as for Haishi she may have not harmed human cultivators but in her case, it wasn't out of an altruistic choice but because she was abundantly cautious and she had almost zero interaction with them.

Having a welcome party thrown for them and the cheers was an all too strange concept for them to fathom and they didn't know quite what to make of it or even how to react.

"What are you two spacing out for? it's your party you should be enjoying it, no? Spirit beasts and humans may be different but we all enjoy good food irrespective of what that food is. Go eat as for the other complicated stuff you can figure out as time goes by but as for now just eat, nod, and accept whatever treasures come your way," Yang Qing gently tapped their heads to get them out of their stupor.

Haishi who was flying found her body gravitating towards Yang Qing's hand with the same thing happening with Bolin who was about a foot tall floating upwards towards Yang Qing.

Yang Qing's gentle tap seemed to have had a calming effect on them as they seemed less tense and a little more at ease.

"Here this is for you two. As your boss, it's only right I get my underlings something. They should suit you both perfectly," Yang Qing said as he held two things in his hands.

On his left hand was a small smooth white-blue pearl that seemed to have wing water wave patterns on it and on his right hand was a one hundred moon cleansing hawthorn flower. It was pristinely white and had five petals each having four moons appearing on them making the total moons on the flower to be twenty.

Bolin and Haishi had uniquely different reactions to the objects in Yang Qing's hands.

Haishi had a greedy madly infatuated look as her blood started boiling and her heartbeat wildly craving the smooth white-blue pearl with the wing water wave patterns. As for Bolin, he had a completely different reaction. His pupils were constricted and his body frozen in fear as if he had seen his nemesis. He felt a deep intrinsic threat coming from the hundred moon cleansing hawthorn flower like if he tried to even breathe around it he would die a most gruesome death.

"The pearl is a wisdom pearl from a flying water mist python that was half-step into the palace realm," Yang Qing said as he brought the pearl forward in Haishi's direction.

"Feng Xin told me he gave you a drop of the primordial lotus dew. I'm afraid due to your cultivation realm limitations you were unable to make the most out of it and the little dew you absorbed you only scratched the surface with it. This pearl should help you gain further comprehension of the dew you absorbed and refine it even further.

It contains over a thousand years' worth of cultivation insight of the flying water mist python. It will help you solidify your cultivation further and give you a better understanding of the water dao," Yang Qing said as he finally gave the pearl to Haishi whose eyes were glittering. If dragonflies had drool she would already have formed a waterfall.

Spirit beasts had different ways of growing their cultivation. Some had inherited powerful bloodlines to rely on which either came from a long-lost ancestor or it could be a close relation such as a parent.

Cultivation methods, insight, and other secret arts are usually passed down through this bloodline and the thicker the bloodline the more the spirit beast can harvest making cultivation easier for the spirit beast as it already has a guide on which path to take thus avoiding a lot of detours.

The progeny of strong spirit beasts enjoy this privilege however spirit beasts that have an impure and thin watered-down bloodline of their ancestor struggle to realize the potential of their bloodline. They can only use external means to try and improve their cultivation realm and or thicken their bloodlines and awaken the secrets within.

Examples of these external means are the use of specific herbs that have a relation to their bloodline such as using a water attribute herb to help with a bloodline related to the water dao. The other means which is usually the most common route most spirit beasts employ is to consume another spirit beast with a stronger or almost similar bloodline. For example, a fire salamander can consume a fire poison toad to try and thicken its bloodline. This is one of the reasons spirit beasts constantly battle each other.

However there was another reason spirit beasts wantonly plunder each other to the extent that even those spirit beasts with powerful bloodlines would choose to do so, and that is the presence of wisdom pearls.

All spirit beasts have beast cores which are their equivalent of a dantian but not all spirit beasts have wisdom pearls. A wisdom pearl is the condensation of the spirit beast's insights and experiences in cultivation. Only spirit beasts who have touched upon a form of dao can form a wisdom pearl which is usually located in their glabella though it's not guaranteed that it will always be there for every spirit beast.

The wisdom pearl not only houses their cultivation insight and experiences but also counts as a lifesaver to powerful spirit beasts. Spirit beasts that are atleast at the later stages of the domain realm can survive even if their bodies get destroyed as long as their wisdom pearls remain intact. It even has a chance of reforming its body if a drop of its blood essence remains. Yes, it would take time but unlike humans who would require a mountain of precious herbs to reform their bodies, the spirit beast with a wisdom pearl and a drop of true blood essence requires only time, safe space, dense spiritual qi, and nothing else.

However, this means of self-preservation only works on spirit beasts at the later stages of the domain realm as they are able to imbue their will to the wisdom pearl basically turning the pearl into almost like a treasured artifact that houses and protects their soul. Only a spirit beast that has higher or equivalent willpower to them can erase their will and subsequently soul from that wisdom pearl rendering that wisdom pearl usable. But if they attempt to use a wisdom pearl that still has a will that they cannot

break, the spirit beast risks having its body used as a shell for the pearl when its soul gets erased by the strong will and body possessed.

This is why spirit beasts at the domain stage rarely get into fights except in extenuating circumstances like if a treasure is involved or if there's an irreconcilable feud. However, spirit beasts below the domain realm fight rampantly with the aim of consuming the opponent's wisdom pearl to improve their cultivation realm with no risk of possession.

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To cowardly overcautious Haishi, getting her hands on a wisdom pearl was something she never imagined more so one that suited her this well. The flying water mist python is a spirit beast skilled in camouflage techniques through the use of mist. Just this point alone would help Haishi strengthen her mirage techniques ignoring the other water insights the python had stored in the pearl for over a thousand years. She held it close almost afraid it would break before she hurriedly stored it in her Order issued storage bracelet that was tied to one of her legs.

Just like the cloud-swallowing kite both she and Bolin, each had a gold bracelet with an eagle symbol worn on their legs. The bracelet was a storage treasure that doubled up as a tracker too.

Bolin couldn't help but look at Haishi enviously. His path wasn't related to water but even he would gain an enormous harvest from gaining the cultivation insights of a spirit beast that had almost reached the palace stage. It would help widen his cultivation horizons.

He couldn't help but notice the unfairness of the gifts. Haishi got a wisdom pearl while he was most likely getting the hawthorn that would harm him with just a touch.

"Is it because of Li Lun?" Bolin couldn't help but wonder if it was because he agreed to support the green flash viper in ambushing Feng Xin.

"I guess it can't be helped. I should be glad I'm even alive," Bolin sighed as he thought his guess was right on the mark.

"I'm not giving you the hundred moon cleansing hawthorn because I hold a grudge against you for ambushing Feng Xin if that's what you think," said Yang Qing as he smiled seemingly seeing through Bolin's mind who flinched at Yang Qing's words.

"I meant what I said, you are one of us now despite your past. All you are and what matters to me is you're Bolin a member of the Order under my court as such you're my responsibility and I won't treat you any different than I do the rest of my team," Yang Qing gently said.

"The reason why I'm giving you this flower is for your good, which judging by your reaction you need it more than you think if you ever want to reach the palace realm," said Yang Qing as his eyes gleamed in wisdom.

Bolin couldn't help but throw a perplexed gaze at him. Yang Qing didn't leave him guessing as he swiftly went on with his explanation.

"Because of your environment, you must have focused all your attention on strengthening your poisonous attribute. For other spirit beasts, it's not an issue but for you it is. A rainbow mist toad isn't known only for its poison but also for its healing properties which you seemed to have erroneously neglected.

Your body is currently at an imbalance and if you kept on with your current tread by the time you reached the peak of the core formation realm your poison would have grown beyond your body's ability to handle it. Only a matching restorative ability can restrain it and without it your body will be destroyed from within," Yang Qing solemnly said as he eyed the now pale-looking Bolin who couldn't help but inadvertently croak in fear.

"Herein lies your solution," Yang Qing said as he brought the hundred-moon-cleansing hawthorn which added further panic to Bolin once he saw how close it was to him.

"Though it's a fraction of the real thing since it only has twenty moons activated but it should be more than enough to help you strengthen your restoration attribute. You will need to cultivate next to it at least three hours every day until the day it feels like an irresistible tonic to you as opposed to the dreadful feeling it's currently giving you.

The day you feel drawn to the hawthorn will be the day you'll finally know what a true rainbow mist toad is and why every alchemist wants them," Yang Qing mysteriously said as he handed the hundred moon cleansing hawthorn to Luo Meili.

"Meili you're the best with this so you'll be in charge of his training and when the day comes help him to maximize the benefits he can get from the flower," said Yang Qing.

The hundred-moon cleansing hawthorn was known for its ability to be an all-around restorative herb. It had an especially curative effect when it came to poison and miasma. A hundred moon-cleansing hawthorn that had activated all its moons would have melted Bolin in his current state rather than the suppressive feeling he presently got. Currently, the suppressive effect was what Bolin needed most to turn the turbulent poison in his body milder. The milder it got the more he could stand to be around the flower.

Luo Meili nodded as she gently smiled at Bolin which for some reason made him feel an extreme fear that was a hundred times more terrifying than what he got from the hundred moon-cleansing hawthorn.

The rest as if on cue started handing Haishi and Bolin cultivation resources as gifts which surprised them as they were no less precious than what Yang Qing gave.

Bolin and Haishi soon forgot themselves as they gave a daoist salutes of thanks that Feng Xin had briefly taught them. Though Haishi's salutes looked odd as she had no fingers to form a fist or a vertical palm. It created a few laughs that added a little warmth to the party.

#### Chapter 98 98: Roaming Inquisitors

Ellie was hidden in the trees cautiously eyeing the party going on. She had an envious greedy look to her as she wanted to come and eat her fill with all the food spread about. Though occasionally her eyesight would fall on Haishi though it was not a look one would give a potential teammate.

She was already on thin ice with Yang Qing, especially from the earlier debacle where she tried to nab some of his fish from the pond. She was not sure she would escape alive if she made an appearance. She didn't want to test it.

The party was already in full swing as the cloud-swallowing kite by the name of Ellie was undergoing a risk vs reward debate. There were laughs, mingling, food being passed around, gazes being traded every now and then and wine being refilled every few seconds. It was an all-jolly mood. The two subjects of

the party were nodding and bowing every now and then as they exchanged a few words. Both Haishi and Bolin were given voice transmission beads fashioned as small amulets around their necks.

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"You must be pleased with yourself for having new subordinates to help lessen your workload," Kang Huilang snidely remarked with clear envy rife in his tone.

Yang Qing had already left his role as the host as he sat with the other five judges; Kang Huilang, Dai Chen, Zhang Qingge, Xia Boqin, and Yu Huifang.

Yi Jie was closely monitoring the hundred-leaf sugar cane wine that looked almost done while Feng Xin was hard at work barbecuing the thin strips of the rapid snapper cotton mouth.

"Of course I am, why wouldn't I be after getting such capable subordinates," Yang Qing smugly said trying to stoke Kang Huilang's envy further.

The ploy didn't seem to have worked as Kang Huilang started smiling soon after.

"Too bad the new subordinates won't get to be with their boss much since he just got a promotion. Wait come to think of it you'll have to work alone since most of your team still hasn't reached the requirements for your new post.

How will you survive Yang Qing, my dear friend," Kang Huilang said with fake pity plastered on his face.

Yang Qing who was acting like a smug cockerel a few minutes ago slumped down in his seat as he had on a serious solemn look that was soon destroyed with a red braised pork in his hand.

The manpower issue was something he had to ponder seriously. He was the only one in his team with a palace stage cultivation realm. About the only one who could come with him was Yi Jie who was in the quasi-palace stage and had proved to have enough combat ability to guarantee his life against an early-stage palace stage cultivator. The rest would be hard-pressed to do so. However, the only person who

could go with him to handle palace court cases was about to go into seclusion. He would have to make due on his own for a couple of months before Yi Jie could join him.

"But even if Yi Jie reaches the palace realm we will still be severely undermanned. No.. no... I will have to intensify Feng Xin's training further to make sure he joins up," Yang Qing thought as he threw a determined menacing gaze in Feng Xin's direction.

Feng Xin who was joyfully barbecuing the rapid snapper cotton mouth making sure it was crisp while he whistled joyfully had his body suddenly freeze. He had detected something ominous heading his way which made him hurriedly turn his head only to meet Yang Qing's determined look.

"What's he up to? Has he decided to use force to get the rest of the green-flowered babirusa? No, I will have to stash it in the Order's treasury. It costs a few spirit stones a year to store anything there but it's safer there than with me especially now that Yang Qing has set his greedy eyes on it.

Shame on you Yang Qing, just because I owe you a few thousand spirit stones and made you take out the vermilion wine you want to get your hands on the rest of the babirusa. Dream on," Feng Xin thought as he threw Yang Qing a supercilious look and went back to his 'true calling'.

"This bastard," Yang Qing ground his teeth as he saw the look Feng Xin gave him.

"You know you will be given roaming inquisitors once you come to the palace courts right?" Dai Chen said once he saw Yang Qing's state.

"I know but ordering them around will feel awkward for me considering they are my seniors. I prefer ordering Yi Jie and the rest around with zero weight on my conscience but as for the roaming inquisitors..." Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh once his thoughts reached this point. He would actually have to pull his own weight as opposed to shamelessly throwing a job here and there to his team for a fee of course.

Other than that the manpower issue was still a factor. Whenever someone got promoted to the palace courts they would be assigned roaming inquisitors if they were the only ones in their team who had reached the necessary requirements to be promoted to the palace courts. The judges usually had more requirements compared to their inquisitor counterparts who only needed palace-level combat strength

to be promoted while judges had other factors to be evaluated on such as the grades they got on the judgments they passed on their cases.

Roaming inquisitors were inquisitors who were not assigned to a particular judge. They were usually rotated around the courts to fill in places where there was a severe manpower shortage such as filling in as temporary inquisitors for a newly promoted judge who didn't have his/her team with him/her or acting as a temporary replacement for a team that has had high injuries or fatalities.

Despite the spike in growth, the Order is still severely undermanned making roaming inquisitors a scarce resource. Each judge was allowed only two roaming inquisitors. They would have to make do with the two to complete all cases in their docket.

This was Yang Qing's biggest worry since the cases do not reduce just because he was short on teammates. The targets still remained and worse he had heard newbies were usually assigned all the walk-in cases adding more cases to the already enormous load.

"By the way, I heard Lai Lei will be out soon. Tell him he can use my green flame forest to recuperate when he is out. It has not reached its true potential yet but it should offer comfortable sleep compared to the mats in the medicine pavilion," Yang Qing suddenly said when the inquisitor dilemma made him realize Lai Lei the quasi-palace stage inquisitor who got ambushed a couple of months ago by 10 quasi palace stage experts was about to be released.

He had suffered grievous injuries throughout his body but the most serious one was the cracks in his dantian. Luckily for him, the Order's medicine pavilion had some of the best alchemists and medical experts out there with a few of them reaching the gold grade. His dantian got mended in eight months mainly in due part to their techniques and available resources but also because the damage wasn't as severe as far as cracked dantians go. He was about to be released from the medicine pavilion in a week's time.

"I offer my thanks on his behalf I'm sure he will appreciate it," Dai Chen said as he still had his usual wild smile on his face however all present could detect the mild trembling in his pupils.

"You don't have to pretend. It's us," Yu Huifang who was seated next to him gently said as she placed her hand on his back.

"I won't say much but when the time comes bring me along," Kang Huilang solemnly said with battle intent flickering in his eyes.

"Me too," said the rest as they collectively echoed Kang Huilang's intention.

"I will have to impose on you all when the time comes," Dai Chen said as he raised his wine urn. The other judges raised theirs as they clinked them together. However, Zhang Qingge looked rather odd since she was shorter than the rest she had to prop herself up on the table so her wine urn could reach the rest.

"TO A GREAT HUNT AND RETRIBUTION," they all collectively said as they swallowed the wines in their hands.

Just as the six judges were stewing in their camaraderie, a yellow-green figure blitzed from the green flame tree crashing into the middle of Yang Qing's table.

"Can't you atleast try to be gentler in your landing?!!" Yang Qing furiously yelled as he poked the yellow-green round figure in the middle of the table.

"It's too much work," The yellow-green round figure said as it projected its sound around the table. It didn't so much as bother to move as it lay there lazily looking around.

#### Chapter 99 99: Ripple Effects Around The Cases (1)

The yellow-green round creature looked like a weaver bird however it had a few distinctive features that separated it from regular weavers. For one was its excessively rotund body that made it look more like a sheep than a bird as its feathers even seemed fluffier than wool.

The creature looked to be about two and a half meters in diameter, it was round all over that even spotting its neck and legs proved difficult. However, despite its goofy look, it had a regal bearing to it. Its eyes were deep black holding a sense of profoundness in them as a cluster of stars occasionally flickered in its eyes. Its eyes seemed to be like a nebula. At its head, it had what looked like an imprint of a purple crown.

With those two distinctive features, any cultivator off the street would know what creature this was, a celestial nesting weaver bird. It was a spirit beast with a superior bloodline that matched the likes of

golden roc, black tortoise, phoenix, kunpeng, dragons, and vermilion birds ...creatures known to be the apex among spirit beasts.

However, unlike its fellow top-tier bloodline compatriots, the celestial nesting weaver was utterly useless combat-wise. Its forte lay in sniffing out treasures and using them to build a godly nest that would outmatch any abode out there including even those in holy lands. It was a creature driven by the desire to create the most comfortable space to live other than that it wasn't bothered by anything else including even taking care of its young. It was why their population was so pitifully few ignoring the constraints of copulation that comes with spirit beasts that have powerful bloodlines. Celestial nesting weavers would kick out their young immediately after they hatch to avoid worrying about feeding them or raising them since it's a chore when that time could be spent sleeping or making the nest comfier.

The younglings have to start living by themselves with the pitiful scraps their parents leave them with. Though the definition of scraps in a celestial nesting weaver's eye is vastly different from most creatures out there. To them, anything in the lower ranks of sky grade might as well be dung, so whatever scraps the parents threw to their young was well enough to sustain them in their younger years or get them killed if they drew some greedy cultivator's or spirit beast's eyes.

"So what are you doing here? It's not like you to make an appearance especially since there's not much that may catch your eye here," Yang Qing exasperatedly asked as he rolled the celestial nesting weaver off the table onto the ground and went on to use it as a footstool.

Despite its clear annoyance at being used as a footstool, the celestial nesting weaver didn't even bother to move. It rolled its eyes however halfway through it felt it was a bother so it just returned its gaze back to normal.

"I sensed something interesting," said the celestial nesting weaver as its gaze trailed to where Haishi and Bolin were.

Yang Qing found its gaze strange since due to its lazy nature even eating was usually a bother to it not unless the food was some precious herb that drew its eye. But Yang Qing knew its temperament very well, there was nothing here that would draw its attention that it would decide to leave the comfort of its nest and forego sleep.

The celestial nesting weaver has been with him for the past six years. He had once won an award that let him pick one treasure from the Order's treasury and after going through the catalog of things he could

pick, it was a no-brainer to him. The celestial nesting weaver was the best choice and nothing else came close.

With the Order's stingy nature of giving out almost bare abodes having a creature whose talent lay in creating a heavenly abode was the greatest gift he could have and he also felt a sense of kindred kinship with the bird in their love for sleep and comfort. At the time all he saw was a kingly abode and ignored the expense of having such a choosy bird that refuses any material below high-rank sky grade in building its nest.

Most of his merit points and income are spent on buying precious materials for the celestial nesting weaver to use for its nest which unlike its current lackluster nature gets very verbose as it criticizes every single material causing Yang Qing no small amount of endless grief. However, despite its critical nature, it lives up to its reputation. Ever since Yang Qing started living there much to its displeasure, he has never once spent time in his courtyard.

The quality and comfort were miles apart. Infact it was in part due to that nest that he got enough accumulation to breakthrough to the palace stage. Everything within that nest was geared toward comfort. Comfort in cultivating, breathing, sleeping, eating anything that could be done would be done comfortably while in that nest. The nest was suffused with the celestial nesting weaver's dao, the dao of restful solace.

Since the celestial nesting weaver was already stronger than Yang Qing cultivation-wise, it was at the fourth stage of the palace real when Yang Qing was just at the peak of the core formation realm at the time, he benefited much from interacting with its rich dao-filled nest.

"Yaoting, you seem fluffier every time I see you," Zhang Qingge said as she buried her head in his feathers with her small body which made it roll away from Yang Qing's feet.

"It's only natural," Yaoting the celestial nesting weaver said smugly taking Zhang Qingge's statement as a complement. It also seemed to rather enjoy her head rubbing on its feathers like a cat whose back ear was being rubbed.

The celestial nesting weaver was an extremely prideful bird despite its lazy nature. It rarely allows people to get within a few feet of it let alone touch it. It tolerated Yang Qing since in its eyes he was its human servant and letting him stay in its nest could be considered payment and Yang Qing was ultimately too shameless.

Other than Yang Qing it was actually receptive to Zhang Qingge for some reason and Xia Boqin. Though in the case of the latter was mostly his noble temperament that the celestial nesting weaver admired. It actually much preferred if Xia Boqin would have been its human servant compared to Yang Qing who was a complete slob. It was also because of this reason it disliked Kang Huilang, who in its eyes was just another Yang Qing except with yellow hair.

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"You're not interested in the rainbow mist toad are you?" Yang Qing curiously asked when he saw the celestial nesting weaver's eyes still darting in that direction.

"That toad might seem important to you humans but not to me. My attention is on the mirage dragonfly next to it....it's origins don't seem simple. It may not have a lofty bloodline like mine but it's barely passable to be ranked first-rate. It's actually its seals that interest me, they seem rather ingenious," said the celestial nesting weaver as its eyes twinkled and its crown flashed in a brief purple light.

"Haishi? Was there something I missed?" Yang Qing couldn't help but mutter curiously. The rest of the judges also curiously stared at it. Some may distrust or even hate the celestial nesting weaver's pompous guts (Kang Huilang) but they knew its appraisal ability was always on the mark.

"Bolin can you come here for a second," Yang Qing decided to call Bolin over when he still struggled to spot anything off with Haishi. He hoped Bolin might know a few details about her despite spirit beasts being wary and distant to each other.

Bolin and Haishi had noticed the moment the celestial nesting weaver appeared as they felt an innate suppression coming from it. That suppression came from deep within their souls making them feel they were unworthy to be in its presence. This wasn't a cultivation realm suppression but a bloodline one. Though Haishi seemed to fair a bit better compared to Bolin whose whole back was covered in sweat and his legs buckling as if he wanted to kneel.

"Restrain your aura will you," Yang Qing said once he saw Bolin's struggle walking over.

"Why should I?" the celestial nesting weaver pompously said.

"I'll fill your nest with earth-rank herbs if you don't," Yang Qing said not missing a beat.

"YANG QING!!! You would dare?" the celestial nesting weaver said in shock mixed with anger.

"You know very well the answer to that. Now, will you do it or not?" Yang Qing coolly said.

It didn't take long before the celestial nesting weaver decided to give in and reign back its aura which came as a relief to Bolin who finally made it to the table.

Even though the aura was not there the suppression didn't disappear completely as it still felt the urge to kneel before the rotund celestial weaver that had narrowed crescent eyes as it relished Zhang Qingge's head rub.

"Do you know much about Haishi?" Yang Qing asked without beating around the bush.

"I'm sorry Master Yang Qing there's not much I know about her other than what the rest of the spirit beasts may know. Infact I may know less than the rest since I was mostly a recluse and barely left my lair," Bolin said with an embarrassed smile.

"Tell me about the little you know even silly rumors can count," Yang Qing gently said.

"Well, there was the odd partnership between her and the green-flowered babirusa. The babirusa was usually temperamental and territorial when it came to food but for some reason, it let her tag along despite her being weaker. That partnership was always rather strange.

Other than that the only other strange thing is how she has survived this long or how she even became a core formation realm spirit beast. As far as I can tell she has little combat experience which in and of itself is something strange in a place as volatile as the green fog region.

Everything around her is shrouded in secrecy. We spirit beasts avoid each other but we are atleast roughly aware of each other's territories so as to avoid conflict or trigger one through expansion. This

case is especially observed by spirit beasts in the early stages of the core formation realm who constantly seek each other out for battle.

However in her case no spirit beast even knows where she lives, the only other spirit beasts whose lairs are veiled in secrecy are the three false kings and the overlord of the eighth zone. But in the case of the three false kings, we at least know their sphere of influence and as for the overlord, no one dares to find out.

Now that I think about it the only evidence of Haishi being seen was only when she was trailing the babirusa. Her whereabouts before and after are completely unknown then again I'm not the most reliable when it comes to information but I have a friend who may know more though his identity is a little sensitive," Bolin said with a little caution.

"Who is it?" Yang Qing curiously asked when he saw Bolin's strange look.

"The green flash viper that escaped from master Feng Xin. He is also one of the three false kings," Bolin said after some hesitation.

#### Chapter 100 100: Ripple Effects Around The Cases (2)

"False kings huh? They sound like really big deals?" Zheng Hu at some point had already shown up at Yang Qing's table with Feng Xin not far behind with a bowl filled with the barbecued rapid snapper cottonmouth.

Yang Qing who had been focused on the false kings had his attention stolen as he gulped with his gaze glued on the piping hot crispy brown thin stripped meat. Luckily at the back of his mind, he still remembered that he was the host as he handed out green smooth bamboo chopsticks and divided up the rapid snapper cotton mouth in round wooden shaped bowls.

"Bolin I'm not too sure if you want any?" Yang Qing cautiously asked. This was a grey area for him. On one hand, spirit beasts killed and ate each other but on the other, he didn't know maybe they had some sort of friendship so it may be odd to offer a friend for him to eat. He wasn't sure where spirit beasts drew the line on eating each other.

"I humbly accept your gracious offer master Yang Qing and you too master Feng Xin for preparing it," Bolin as he cupped his fists in thanks.

"The rapid snapper cotton mouth was no friend of mine. One could even consider us enemies due to our relations though if he was a friend I'd still eat him with no qualms. For spirit beasts, though I don't speak for all but in the green fog region we do mourn our lost compatriots but we will still eat them after. It's not that we are heartless but once we reach the core formation realm it takes almost a century before our body decomposes and in that time some other spirit beast may eat us. If that's the case better a friend eats me than a stranger. We think of it as the final thing we can do to help a friend on both sides of the table. One friend helps the other get stronger and increase their survivability and the other gives his/her friend the dignity of passing by doing a noble deed and not end up in some rival spirit beasts stomach," Bolin added seemingly reading Yang Qing's thoughts.

"That's an interesting culture," Mao Yunru said. She had arrived at some point when the barbecued meat of the rapid snapper cotton mouth was being served. She decided to join Zhang Qingge in petting the celestial nesting weaver.

Yi Jie came too with his cauldron in hand. Though it had morphed into an almost human size wine gourd. It had reached half his height and was propped in between one of his elbows.

The rest of the guests as if they had a prior agreement started moving their tables and chairs closer to where Yang Qing and the rest were. Before this, the tables were widely spread over the abnormally large porch however currently they all seemed to circle the fireplace like a close-knit campfire with only a few feet of gap for someone to pass through.

Yang Qing on seeing this raised his palm which had a small half-moon symbol appearing on it and pointed it towards the dining table that had all the food spread about. The table started moving gently towards them before stopping a few feet from them.

"Yi Jie the wine," Yang Qing greedily said as he cozily sat down with the bowl of barbecued rapid snapper cotton mouth in hand.

Dai Chen's eyes also lit up at the mention of wine as he ferociously licked his lips as Yu Huifang shook her head at his current look.

"Pour for it one too. It hates to admit it but it likes your wine," Yang Qing said as he pointed toward the celestial nesting weaver.

"Good human servant," the celestial nesting weaver thought as it gave Yang Qing a nod of approval one would give an underling for perfectly doing a menial task. Yang Qing chose to conveniently ignore it.

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Yi Jie uncorked the wine gourd as he skillfully poured a crystal clear wine that had tinges of blue in it onto the wine urns placed around the table. The scent of the wine was refreshing and adding the nature look of Yang Qing's abode it made one think they were laying lazily on the grass to the sound of a gently flowing river by their feet.

"Yi Jie you really outdid yourself....When you get time please make another barrel for me," Dai Chen who couldn't hold himself back excitingly said as he took another sip of the wine.

The wine was gentle and mellow but it also had a pleasant heaviness to it. Everyone present couldn't help but have their eyes light up when they had a sip except for Cao Ying and his friends who couldn't have any due to their low cultivation realm.

The hundred-leaf sugarcane wine may be gentle but should anyone below the core formation realm drink even a sip of it they would feel like an exploding volcano filled with turbulent energy. The energy contained in the wine was too much for Cao Ying and the rest to handle. Thus they could only look on enviously as they munched on the spring rolls and some ginseng tea. Though Feng Xin was kind enough to give them a few pieces of the rapid snapper cottonmouth.

"Yi Jie you can stay in my nest for a month," the celestial nesting weaver offhandedly said as it rolled over to take another sip of its wine. It couldn't be bothered to hold the wine urn with its wings when it could conveniently roll over with little effort.

"Thanks," said Yi Jie as he nodded in gratitude.

"This lazy thing must have really been pleased with the wine..well that works well for me since I had intended for it to let Yi Jie stay over to increase his chances of breaking through to the palace stage faster. This saves me the treasures that I would have spent convincing it," Yang Qing gleefully thought.

"So the false kings who are they?" Zheng Hu asked. The rest paid apt attention too as they ate their barbecued meat with the hundred leaf sugar cane wine.

The Order had no presence in the green fog region and it wasn't only them but other organizations and sects too. The green fog region was recognized as a spirit beast territory that no human would dream of conquering not unless the two holy lands tried their hand. Though with the map drawn by the soul formation adventurer highlighting the region's power distribution, it was a doubt that even the holy lands would dare try their hands in that place especially considering there was a zone that even the soul formation expert didn't dare step into. Just the boundary itself had made the soul formation expert stay rooted for a month before he used every willpower he had just to move. It, therefore, became evident how dangerous the green fog region could be.

"They are the rulers of the region we stay in. They are spirit beasts who have won the approval and fear of all the spirit beasts in the region due to their ferocious might. There are three in total and the youngest of them is Li Lun, the green flash viper, followed by Liao Ying the black cosmos caiman, and lastly Su Gen the dystopian gaze turtle.

Dong Gen is the oldest of the three. As far as I can remember he has always been a false king for the past three thousand years firmly retaining his position while Li Lun and Liao Ying rose into prominence in the past hundred years or so," Bolin paused a bit to take a sip of the wine as he felt a bit unnerved having so many pair of eyes on him.

"So the green flash viper is a false king. Explains how he managed to escape me," said Feng Xin.

"Could you gauge his realm?" Kang Huilang asked as he ate the rapid snapper cotton mouth with relish.

"Probably just broke through to the 9th stage core formation realm," Feng Xin said as he held his chin in contemplation.

"If he is at the 9th stage and he is the youngest then the rest might be at the 10th stage maybe the dystopian gaze turtle is at the peak stage of the core formation realm since he is the oldest and has retained the title of false king the longest. Has your friend Li Lun ever met the turtle, if so what did he say the turtle's realm was?" asked Zheng Hu.

"Li Lun met him once when his renowned got far and wide for him to be dubbed a false king. He had gone to challenge the dystopian gaze turtle however not a single word of what happened in their duel got out including even the location. When I asked Li Lun what happened, he never gave a response but his whole attitude changed. He got more reserved and reigned in himself. He mostly concerned himself with cultivating instead of making a name for himself.

I can only guess something must have happened in the duel to make him change so much. Though he wasn't even injured from the duel which made it even stranger.

Of the three false kings, Dong Gen is not only the oldest but also the most mysterious. He has no subordinates and no fixed territory to speak of," said Bolin.

"That turtle may not be simple," said Yi Jie.

"With their strength why are they false kings though?" Cao Ying asked as his eyes shown in excitement. He had not yet decided which route he would go once he finished his studies. Hearing the tale of the green fog region had him leaning more to the inquisitor's side so he could see the sights and make a name for himself.

"It's because though they are strong they are not the strongest. There is a true overlord of that region that I think even the three of them combined can't hope to defeat him.

I saw him once when I broke through to the core formation realm. Just his gaze alone knocked me unconscious. I'm not even sure why he left me alive. Maybe I was beneath his attention. That was the scariest moment of my life. It was why I became a recluse," Bolin self-deprecatingly said. He still gets terrors and blackouts when he thinks of that experience.

"The green fog region is really as dangerous as the senior said. Feng Xin, you may be lucky you didn't stumble onto it as even you might have to go all out to escape it. What's a spirit beast of that level doing in the eighth zone? I wonder if...," Yang Qing said as his eyes flashed.

"What about the second false king, the black cosmos caiman how is he?" Cao Ying asked completely engrossed in the power scaling.

"Treacherous, violent, bloodthirsty, greedy, maddened with power, cunning and cowardly. He is more.." Bolin was already trembling with anger before he hurriedly closed his mouth because his next words wouldn't bode well for the present company.

"Human than spirit beast is what you wanted to say," Yang Qing said as he playfully smiled.

"Master I..I..I...", Bolin stammered not knowing what to say.

"It's okay you are not wrong we are that way. It seems the one to be wary of is the black cosmos caiman and not the rest," gently said Yang Qing.

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A million miles away in a foggy forest, a creature could be seen limping and wheezing as it painfully dragged something by its mouth. The area was filled with destroyed trees and broken ground like a terrifying battle had just taken place.

"Li Lun I can't believe you hid your power so well,"